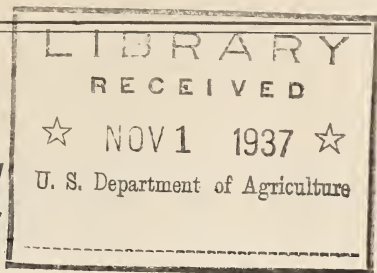


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# *Agricultural Conservation*

## *in 1938—Why?*

**General Information Series**

**Issued October 1937**

*United States Department of Agriculture  
Agricultural Adjustment Administration*

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# CONTENTS

	Page
I. WHAT IS THE PRESENT SITUATION OF AGRICULTURE?-----	1
Cotton-----	3
Wheat-----	3
Corn-----	4
Tobacco-----	4
Other Crops-----	4
II. HOW DO EXTREMES OF SUPPLY AND PRICE AFFECT FARMERS?-----	5
What is the Effect of Prices That are too Low?-----	5
What is the Effect of Prices That are too High?-----	5
What is the Effect of Unstable Farm Income on the Land?-----	6
III. HOW DO EXTREMES OF SUPPLY AND PRICE AFFECT CITY CONSUMERS?-----	6
Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act Protects Consumer-----	7
IV. WHAT KIND OF FARM PROGRAM DOES THE NATION NEED?-----	8
How Much Should Farmers Produce?-----	8
Balanced Farming Conserves the Soil-----	8
Where Should Farm Income Be Stabilized?-----	9
Unity is Essential in a National Farm Program-----	9
V. HOW CLOSELY CAN THE 1938 AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION PROGRAM MEET THE NEEDS OF THE NATION?-----	10
To What Extent Does the Conservation Program Help to Stabilize Farm Income?-----	10
Storing Supplies for Lean Years-----	10
Underwriting Production Risks-----	11
VI. HOW DOES THE 1938 AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION PROGRAM WORK?-----	11
What, and Why, are Goals?-----	11
Payments Under the 1938 Conservation Program-----	13
Farmers Help Plan and Administer Program-----	13

# Agricultural Conservation in 1938— WHY?

As farmers look ahead to 1938 and succeeding years, they are doubtless thinking of two things:

First, how to carry on their farming operations most efficiently and in a manner that will maintain the farm as a good producing unit; and

Second, how to safeguard their income so that they and their families may have a good living.

They are also thinking of the part they play in the economic life of the Nation, both as producers of food and fiber and as consumers of the manufactured goods other groups have to sell.

With this interest in the status of their farm business and their farm homes, they will want to size up their Agricultural Conservation Program for 1938. Also, they will want to consider what further measures may be needed, in 1938 or in following years, to continue the improvement in their status and avoid the repetition of situations like that of 1932.

## I. What is the Present Situation of Agriculture?

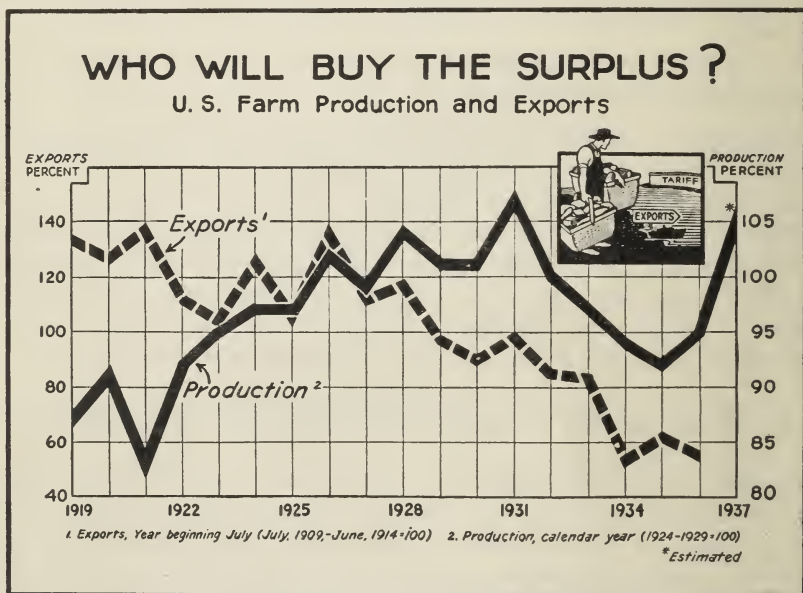
In 1937 the farm industry as a whole is in a much more favorable position than it occupied a few years ago. Five years of national farmer cooperation with the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, together with other recovery measures, and the accident of 2 years of drought followed by good growing conditions, have been important factors in this improvement.

Except in some areas where the effects of drought still exist, and except for producers of certain commodities, farmers have seen their farms benefited from the steps taken to conserve and build up the soil, and from the repair and replacement of their barns, fences, and equipment that their increased income has made possible. In many cases their homes have been improved and new opportunities have opened up for their families. Increased income has placed them in a better all-round financial situation.

Agriculture may be said to have substantially emerged from the major effects of the industrial depression and farm surpluses of 1932, but farmers face real problems in maintaining their gains and in avoiding a recurrence of some of the problems that beset them in 1932.

Good crops have been harvested over most of the United States in 1937. While for some products such as cotton, corn, and potatoes, prices have fallen sharply, the prices of a number of farm commodities are relatively favorable. The business situation and the industrial outlook for the immediate future indicate that consumer demand for farm products will remain close to the levels attained in 1937 and that eventually even higher levels of consumer demand should prevail.

Cash farm income for 1937 is estimated at something less than 9 billion dollars—the largest since 1929. This income will have a buying power nearly equal to that of the incomes of the years immediately previous to 1929, which averaged about 10 billion dollars. This year's income will be spread more evenly throughout the country than those of any recent years, although as usual there are low points in some areas.



Largely because of unusually favorable weather conditions, 1937 agricultural production was greater, generally speaking, than in any other year since 1932. In fact, total crop production was nearly at a record level. The Nation is harvesting a corn crop of more than 2½ billion bushels, a wheat crop of nearly 900 million bushels, a cotton crop of more than 17½ million bales. All these crops are up to or above normal. The potato and tobacco crops were unusually large and milk production was greater than in 1936.

Although the 1937 crop of wheat was large, it was selling in September 1937 for more than \$1 a bushel on the Chicago market, because of smaller world supplies and improved world demand. Farmers, however, should not be misled into thinking that this temporarily favorable situation

reflects a permanent solution of the wheat problem. Another large crop in 1938 could easily, by 1939, duplicate the large surpluses of 1932-33. Big production of cotton in this country and abroad has reduced the cotton price to below 8 cents a pound, and a surplus close to that of 1932 is now in prospect for 1938. Farmers in some areas distant from market have been receiving extremely low prices for potatoes.

The effects of drought on prices of livestock products are still being felt, however. Short feed supplies resulting from drought in 1934 and 1936 have reduced the number of meat animals sent to market in 1937. Cattle and hog prices in September 1937 reached the highest level since the twenties. Butter prices averaged higher than in 1936.

The prevailing supply and price conditions have an important bearing on farmers' plans for 1938 and succeeding years. While the price situation is favorable for some commodities, the big supplies of others have brought declining prices. Favorable weather and big crops for one or two seasons are likely to bring price declines for those commodities which now are in a strong position. Under such conditions, unless preventive measures are taken, farmers' incomes will suffer. Hence farmers will want to follow closely the conditions affecting each of the major farm crops.

## Cotton

The surplus problem is more immediate in the Cotton Belt than in most other parts of the country. The world's supply of all cotton for 1937-38 promises to be more than 49 million bales, and the world never used in any 1 year more than 31 million bales. With a prospective carry-over of 18 or 19 million bales, the supply outlook is distinctly not favorable to producers.

Annual domestic consumption of cotton has improved since the depression years and in 1936-37 reached the record level of nearly 8 million bales—two-thirds greater than in 1932. Foreign consumption of American cotton, however, has decreased and for 1936-37 was around 5½ million bales, or 1 million bales less than for the preceding year.

A record crop was produced this year on a smaller than average acreage and it is beginning to be clear that over-abundant production is not the solution of the cotton problem, of the low exports, or of the low income from cotton. This situation seems to call for a middle course, which avoids excessive production and price collapse, but which keeps the United States in the world cotton market.

## Wheat

In the case of wheat, another great export crop, the carry-over next July may approach 200 million bushels, even if this country exports as much as 100 million bushels this year. This is a carry-over considerably greater than normal. A favorable season in 1938, with a probable 80-million acre planting, equal to that of 1937, would result next year in a



crop which might total nearly a billion bushels. There is no reasonable prospect for a radical increase in foreign demand, and therefore such a crop could result in raising the 1939 carry-over to 400 million or 500 million bushels and bring on a major wheat price collapse.

## Corn

Corn yields are high this year and corn cribs will overflow. A carry-over from the 1937-38 feeding season of between 300 million and 350 million bushels, more than double the normal carry-over, is possible. This supply situation is already being reflected in the price quotations for the 1937 crop. Futures prices for corn as the new crop began to move to market were little more than half of what they were a year ago. This situation will bring about a better balance between supplies of livestock products, particularly pork, and consumer demand. Consumers, however, will not notice the full effect of this increase until farmers have had an opportunity to restock their herds to serve as an outlet for this supply of corn.

The great concern of the corn and hog producers is that the 1938 corn production may be so much in excess of livestock feeding requirements that a return of disastrously low corn prices and eventually low livestock prices will follow in its wake.

## Tobacco

It now appears that Burley tobacco will be in a fairly favorable position during the coming year. But in the case of bright tobacco, which represents half of the total United States production, there is danger ahead, probably in 1938. The 1937 crop was large; and although the price in September was favorable, overproduction is easily possible. The trend of consumption in dark tobacco is still downward and the outlook is still not encouraging.

## Other Crops

In general, 1937 production of feed grains, including corn, was larger than during the 5-year period 1928-32. While carry-overs were smaller than normal, the price level in 1937 is below the 1936 level. Fruit crops are larger than average and prices lower than those of 1936. The 1937 apple crop, especially, is above the levels of recent years. Crops of most vegetables were larger in 1937 than in 1936 and prices are continuing below the levels of last year, although there are some exceptions. On September 1 there were indications that the potato crop would be 22 percent greater than the 1936 crop. The 1937 peanut crop was smaller than that of either 1935 or 1936, but larger than any previous crop except in those years. Rice production in 1937 was larger by more than 4 million bushels than in 1936, and more than 8 million bushels larger than in the 5-year period 1928-32.



## II. How Do Extremes of Supply and Price Affect Farmers?

Abundant supplies of farm products at fair prices are best for farmers and consumers. Farmers and nonfarmers want greater security and stability of production, of income, and of employment.

When farm surpluses become cumulative and unmanageable, the consequences are low farm prices, low farm income, and low purchasing power.

On the other hand, when farm production is too low, farmers do not have enough volume to sell in order to maintain an adequate farm income, even though the prices they receive are so high as to be difficult for consumers to pay.

### What Is the Effect of Prices That Are Too Low?

Instability in farm production, prices, and income sooner or later affects the standard of living on the farm. When farm production is excessive, farm prices and farm income go down. The result is that farmers are financially unable to buy as many city goods. This leads to lowered general business activity and to unemployment in the cities.

Unemployment in the cities means lack of buying power for farm products. This in turn has a further adverse effect on farmers' prices and farmers' income.

### What Is the Effect of Prices That Are Too High?

Danger for farmers also arises when boom periods turn fair prices and farm wages into high prices and high wages.

That was demonstrated during the World War period. There was widespread speculation in farm land. Some farms sold for two or three times their ordinary value. Farm machinery doubled in price. The costs of public improvements rose far above what they had been. Some banks and insurance companies added to the far-flung speculation by making unwise loans. A saving sense of proportion seemed to have been lost. Millions of acres of grassland in the Great Plains were plowed up and seeded to wheat. Other millions of acres of marginal land were temporarily brought into production. All this happened through lack of foresight as to the ultimate consequences of the seeming good times that were then being enjoyed.

After the war the abnormal demand ceased and the surplus production of millions of acres was thrown upon a market of which the export portion had dwindled. In addition, replacement of horses and mules by trucks, tractors, and automobiles had meant the loss of market for 35 million acres of feed crops. Farmers suddenly were forced to make drastic readjustments. The brief period of farm prosperity was followed by a long period of depression.

## **What is the Effect of Unstable Farm Income on the Land?**

Under the pinch of low income farmers are virtually forced to overcrop their soil year after year, to keep every possible acre in cash crops which deplete it and subject it to erosion. They are forced to do this because their fixed charges do not go down when the prices of the things they sell go down. In their efforts to get enough money to pay their taxes, interest, and necessary production costs, farmers often try all the harder to produce as much as they can, so as to make up in number of units what they lack in unit price.

It is estimated that land permanently ruined by erosion within the last hundred years makes up an area equal to all the farm land in two of the large Midwestern agricultural States. If all this soil destruction had occurred in two States the consequences would be much more impressive but no less costly to the Nation.

In addition to exposing land to erosion and loss of the soil itself, continuous growing of soil-depleting crops like cotton and corn has seriously damaged millions of acres of soil. The practice of continually growing a single cash crop with rarely a compensating soil-building crop in rotation, or as a cover crop, has so reduced the fertility of some farming areas that it is impossible to farm this land and maintain a decent standard of living.

The result of instability of farm income has been farm mortgage foreclosures and a nationally increasing tenancy.

Lack of security has prevented many a farmer from making necessary improvements and many a tenant from carrying on the soil-building practices that his land required. No one is going to keep up his house, his barns, or his fences, or even his soil, if he is living under the shadow of excessive mortgaged indebtedness and the constant threat of dispossession.

## **III. How Do Extremes of Supply and Price Affect City Consumers?**

When low farm buying power and other depression factors bring about widespread unemployment, city people who have no money with which to buy are not helped by extremely low prices of farm products. Actually, they are harmed when surpluses on the farms bring bread lines in the cities.

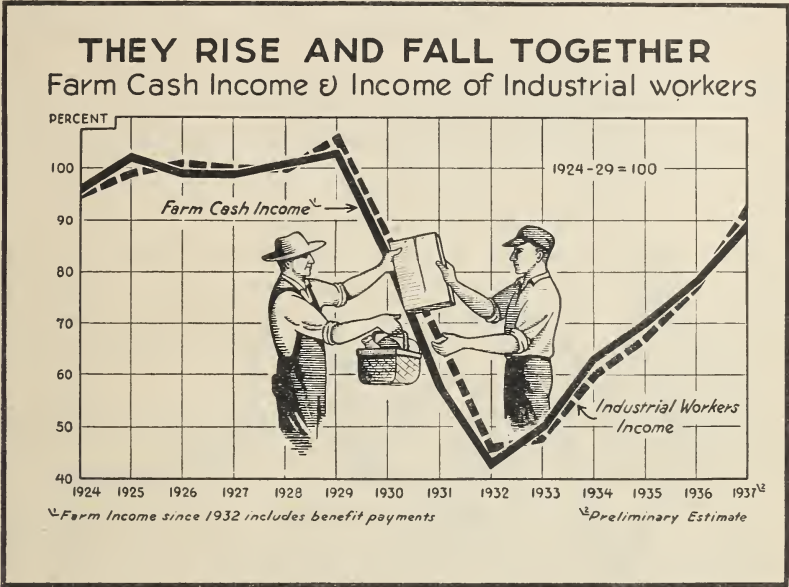
Similarly, consumers suffer when drought or other natural disaster brings shortage and extremely high prices.

Furthermore, the whole consuming public sooner or later pays for soil conservation or for its lack—either beforehand in wise provision, or afterward in higher prices for scantier supplies. It is cheaper and thriftier to prevent erosion, and to conserve the productive power in the soil while there still is good soil to conserve. Unlimited production of

soil-depleting crops for which there is no effective demand results in unwise use of soil resources.

Farmers want adequate supplies of crops to sell, each year; consumers want adequate supplies available for purchase, at a fair price. Farmers want an income which will enable them to run their business efficiently and to have a decent standard of living; city people want farmers to be customers for city-produced goods and services.

Farmers' interest and city consumers' interest in balanced farm production are directly related. Both groups stand to benefit from the operation of a national farm program which tends to stabilize, conserve,



and balance farm production, prices, and income in such fashion that their long-run interests are served.

### Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act Protects Consumer

The Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act requires that the interest of consumers shall be protected through both adequate supplies and fair prices. It authorizes no program which will discourage production of any agricultural commodity below the level of domestic human consumption that prevailed during the period 1920-29, when consumption of farm products was at the highest level in recent decades. Population changes or other factors affecting this consumption level must be considered in its determination.

The act also requires that "due regard shall be given to the maintenance of a continuous and stable supply of agricultural commodities adequate to meet consumer demand at prices fair to both producers and consumers."

## IV. What Kind of Farm Program Does the Nation Need?

Establishment of stable and adequate farm production and farm income, in such balance with nonfarm production and nonfarm income as will provide a better living for all the people, must be the aim of a soundly conceived and permanently successful farm program.

### How Much Should Farmers Produce?

Agriculture's immediate aim must be to produce, year after year insofar as possible, a volume of farm goods that is normally required by a growing population and that can be absorbed by the available domestic and export markets at fair prices.

Much of the foreign market for certain agricultural products to which we were once accustomed has, for the present at least, disappeared or become unprofitable. War fears and nationalistic tendencies of other nations, the tariff policy of this country, and other factors have tended to reduce the profitable export markets for American farm crops.

But the agricultural policy of the United States is to keep on providing adequate supplies for the desirable foreign markets that are open, and to hold or regain such markets. Effort in this direction is being made through the reciprocal trade agreement program and through measures for maintaining world peace.

Farmers want to avoid the soil and labor waste that goes into producing unmarketable surpluses. In determining the proper level at which production should be stabilized, several points must be considered:

1. The need of soil conservation through efficient and economical land use, in order to preserve the productive power of the Nation's farm land for the future necessities of the Nation.

2. The need of adequate and stable supplies, to meet current requirements of consumers and to supply available export outlets. To assure this there must be sufficient carry-over and reserve supplies to meet shortages caused by drought or other uncontrollable natural hazard.

3. The need for avoiding supplies so burdensome that they will result in serious declines in farm prices and will bring industrial unemployment.

### Balanced Farming Conserves the Soil

During the last few years a new idea has taken hold—the idea that farmers should strive not just to make farming pay, but to make it pay and to conserve the land at the same time.

Since farmers, up to the present, have been obliged to mine their soil in order to exist, then it is in the national interest to offer national help for agricultural conservation.

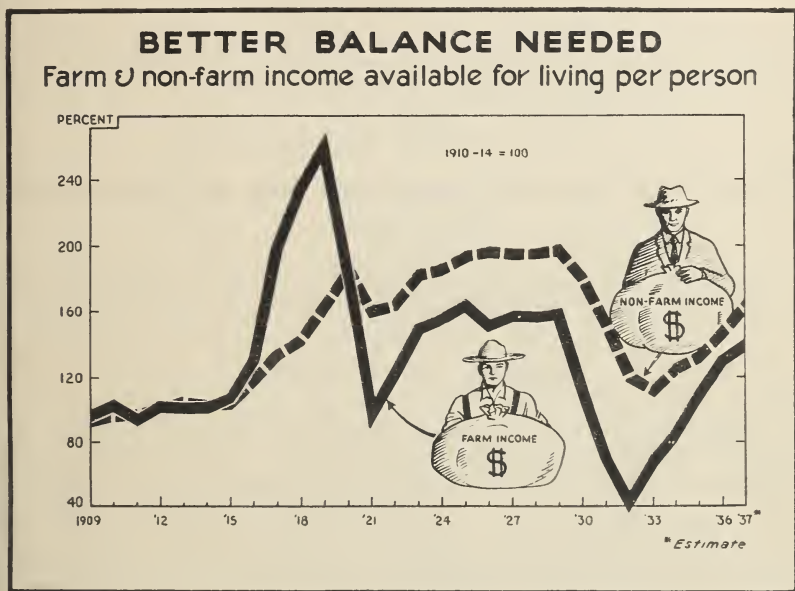


With cooperation from nonfarmers as well as farmers, lands not needed at present to produce certain soil-depleting crops can be put to soil-conserving uses. In this way the Nation can store up wealth in the farm lands and assure consumers of ample food and fiber in the future at reasonable prices.

### Where Should Farm Income be Stabilized?

The Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act declares that farmers have a right to a fair share of the national income.

Parity income as defined in the Soil Conservation Act is an income that will give individuals living on farms a net income per person with the same purchasing power in relation to that of the income of persons not on farms, as prevailed during the 5 years before the war.



In 1936 this standard, had it been attained, would have given farmers a 25 percent greater purchasing power for city goods and services. If such a farm income could be regained and stabilized on this basis, not only would purchasing power of farmers for manufactured goods be increased and stabilized but steadier employment in the cities could be maintained.

### Unity is Essential in a National Farm Program

Unity among farmers and understanding between farmers and consumers are primary needs if a national farm program is to be successfully carried out. Farmers in each region need to know about the problems and the needs of farmers in other regions, and about the problems and the needs of consumers. Consumers need to understand more clearly the problems and conditions of farming. Both need to realize their interdependence.

Problems of different farm commodities and in different regions are not the same, but the program for meeting those problems must be national in scope. Each region and in fact each farmer participating in the program contributes toward the national welfare objectives in the light of the conditions that exist in the region or on the individual farm.

## **V. How Closely Can the 1938 Agricultural Conservation Program Meet the Needs of the Nation?**

Farmers taking part in the 1938 agricultural conservation program will find it possible to do a great deal toward maintaining and improving the productivity of their farms. Also they will be enabled to make more extensive use of soil-conserving crops and soil-building practices on land that otherwise would be used to produce surpluses of soil-depleting crops. To the extent to which farmers as a group take part in the program, there can be accomplishment in maintaining and improving the Nation's soil resources and stabilizing the farm production at more nearly the level of demand, thus helping to stabilize prices and income.

### **To What Extent Does the Conservation Program Help to Stabilize Farm Income?**

Conservation programs carried on under the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act have tended to raise and sustain farm income (1) by indirectly influencing the volume and therefore the prices of farm products, (2) by encouraging more extensive use of efficient farming methods, (3) by providing conservation payments to farmers, and (4) by making the land able to produce more when and if needed. The programs have provided financial assistance to farmers in meeting the immediate out-of-pocket costs of adopting a conservation type of farming.

The present conservation program alone cannot fully prevent the accumulation of burdensome surpluses resulting from favorable growing conditions and big crops. It cannot provide for the storage of reserves in such a manner that they will not depress prices.

Conservation farming makes the land better able to withstand the effects of drought and increases the proportion of crops that are resistant to drought, but a conservation program by itself cannot fully insure the farmer against losses resulting from adverse natural conditions, nor can it assure the consumer of an adequate supply of foodstuffs every year.

### **Storing Supplies for Lean Years**

Conservation of the soil needs to be supplemented by storage of staple crops on the farm or in warehouses, for use in lean years. Loans to producers on the security of the stored commodities would supply stability to farm incomes, while the existence of the stored supplies themselves would assure the consumer that he would not encounter scarcity or excessive prices in years of crop failure. Such storage, which would be en-



couraged under an Ever Normal Granary plan, would supplement and extend the conservation principle as it is embodied in the present program.

## **Underwriting Production Risks**

If the present program were supplemented by crop insurance, there would be further protection for farmers' income in years of crop failure. Crop insurance, as proposed on an experimental basis for wheat, would assist farmers to cooperate in underwriting for themselves some of the production risks of their business.

## **VI. How Does the 1938 Agricultural Conservation Program Work?**

The new program represents a progressive development from the previous programs formulated under the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act. It follows the broad outlines already established, but sets up more definite objectives for 1938.

The 1938 program operates on the principle of a single payment for each farm, this payment conditioned on not exceeding the soil-depleting crop acreages established for the farm, and on reaching the soil-building goal for the farm through use of approved soil-conserving crops and soil-building practices. Deductions from the maximum rate of payment are provided for, in cases where the established goals have not been fully met.

### **What, and Why, Are Goals?**

Under the 1938 program, acreage goals for soil-depleting crops are established for the Nation and for States, counties, and individual farms. For each individual participating farm there will also be established a soil-building goal expressed in acres.

The national goal for all soil-depleting crops in 1938 is 273 to 288 million acres. This acreage is so calculated as to produce an abundance of farm goods, but not to produce surpluses that will bring low prices and loss to farmers. The goals represent what is considered to be the desirable soil-depleting crop acreage for the Nation in 1938, and the amount of soil building which can and should be accomplished through the methods and with the funds which are available.

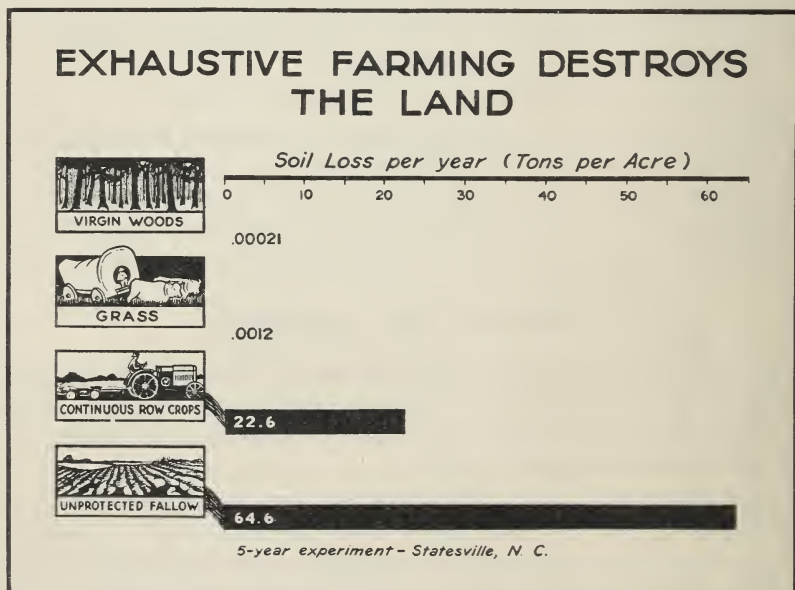
The goals were determined on the basis of recommendations by farmers, especially those serving on county conservation and county planning committees, specialists from the State agricultural colleges, extension services, experiment stations, and officials of the Department of Agriculture. Soil-conservation requirements, past production, present supplies, and market outlooks for farm commodities, and the question of how farmers' incomes can be stabilized at or near the levels contemplated in the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act were all considered in making these recommendations.

The total national soil-depleting goal includes separate goals for corn, cotton, rice, peanuts, Irish potatoes, and tobacco. It also includes a general soil-depleting goal for a list of crops which includes wheat, oats, barley, rye, flax, grain sorghums, soybeans, and truck crops.

The national goals for the crops indicated are:

	Acres
Corn.....	92,000,000- 96,000,000
Cotton.....	27,000,000- 29,000,000
Rice.....	825,000- 875,000
Peanuts.....	1,500,000- 1,600,000
Irish (white) potatoes.....	3,100,000- 3,300,000
Tobacco.....	1,577,800- 1,653,000
Other soil-depleting crops.....	145,000,000-155,000,000

Within the limits of the national goals for the various soil-depleting crops, State and county goals are set up, and the county agricultural



conservation committee will establish, for each individual farm in the county, goals for each of the soil-depleting crops or groups of crops grown on the farm. In establishing individual farm goals, the committee will consider such points as (1) the tillable acreage on the farm, (2) the type of soil and topography, (3) the production facilities, (4) the crop-rotation system in use, (5) previous production history, and (6) in some regions the acreage of food and feed crops needed for consumption on the farm.

For each individual farm the committee will also establish a soil-building goal. In determining this goal the committee will take into consideration the conservation needs of the farm and the measures which would have to be taken in order to meet those needs.

## Payments Under the 1938 Conservation Program

The Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act authorizes the appropriation of not more than \$500,000,000 in any one year for carrying out the purposes of the act. Payments under the conditions and at the rates set forth in the provisions of the program will depend upon the appropriation, by Congress, of money for that purpose.

Payments provided for under the program are designed to assist farmers in meeting the immediate cost of carrying out the soil-improving measures which the program encourages and to offset in part any temporary loss of income which results from devoting an increased proportion of their cropland to soil-conserving uses rather than to the production of cash crops.

Payments to cooperating farmers will be determined by the extent to which they approach the soil-depleting and soil-building goals for their farms or ranches.

The maximum payment which can be made on a given farm is the sum of a group of separate items. These consist of a specified amount for each acre in the general soil-depleting crop goal of the farm; specified amounts for the farm's normal yield per acre for each acre in the corn, cotton, tobacco, rice, pear, nut, and potato goals; specified amounts per acre for acreage of commercial vegetables and commercial orchards; a specified amount per acre for the soil-conserving acreage of the farm or an equivalent amount computed otherwise; a specified amount per acre for land designated as "restoration land", that is, land on which because of its physical condition and texture and because of climatic conditions a permanent vegetative cover should be restored; and a specified amount for noncrop open pasture land, based on the acreage and the grazing capacity.

Deductions from the maximum payment rate will be made for failure to stay within the total soil-depleting acreage goals or the goals for individual crops; for failure to meet the soil-building goal; for breaking up native sod in the Great Plains States, except where, with the approval of the county committee, it is compensated for by restoring to native cover an equal acreage of cropland; and for failure to adopt approved methods of preventing wind and water erosion in certain areas.

These deductions will be governed by the extent to which the conservation measures taken on the farm have fallen short of the objectives which have been set.

### Farmers Help Plan and Administer Program

Through the agricultural conservation programs nearly 4 million farmers joined together in 1936 and 1937 in a cooperative effort toward better balanced farming. This cooperative effort is continued and intensified in the 1938 program.

Each farmer who participates in the program becomes a member of the agricultural conservation association of his county. In community meet-

ings, participating farmers elect community committeemen. Chairmen of community committees comprise the board of directors of the county association who elect from their number the county committee.

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